

(Washington, DC) - The United States House of Representatives today passed the bipartisan Traumatic Brain Injury Enhancement and Long-Term Support Act (H.R. 2199) which was based on a bill previously introduced by Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) to ensure the proper treatment of traumatic brain injuries (TBI) sustained by veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill passed by a bipartisan vote of 421-0.

"I am pleased that Congress has passed this important legislation that will improve health care for our nation's returning veterans," said Congressman Altmire. "Unfortunately, traumatic brain injury has become the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan with more than half of combat casualties returning home with associated brain injuries. This bill will ensure that our brave men and women are properly screened for TBI and receive the treatment they need and deserve."

Congressman Michael Michaud (ME-02), chairman of the Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health, presented a letter to Congressman Altmire on the House floor and thanked him for his leadership on this issue. "The provisions from your legislation will be critical to improving the care given to our veterans suffering from TBI," wrote Congressman Michaud. "They will enable the VA to develop a better understanding of the challenges posed by TBI and to establish best practices to ensure the best possible care. TBI is a long-term consequence of our operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Your bill takes a long-term view and will help the VA to provide these heroes with the care that they deserve."

Congressman Altmire introduced the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury Act (H.R. 1944) on April 20. H.R. 1944 required the Veterans Affairs Administration to institute a program to screen veterans for symptoms of TBI; develop and operate a comprehensive program of long-term care for post-acute TBI rehabilitation; establish a TBI transition office at each of the polytrauma network sites nationwide; and create and maintain a TBI veteran health registry. All of Congressman Altmire's provisions were included as part of H.R. 2199, legislation introduced by Congressman Michaud. H.R. 2199 also includes language to expand VA resources to provide rural communities with "mobile vet centers" for limited mental health services.

"More than 24,000 troops have been wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan," said Congressman Altmire. "Our veterans have sacrificed so much in their service to our country and have every right to expect they will receive the finest quality health care when they return home. H.R. 2199 brings us closer to keeping our promises to our veterans."

In addition to H.R. 2199, Congressman Altmire voted today to address some of the other challenges facing veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. Today's legislation includes:

- Returning Servicemember VA Healthcare Insurance Act (H.R. 612): Increases veterans' eligibility for health care due to combat service to five years following active duty, thus helping to ensure the treatment of soldiers suffering from mental health conditions which are not immediately diagnosed such as post-traumatic stress disorder;
- Veterans Outreach Improvement Act (H.R. 67): Allows the VA to partner with state and local governments to reach out to veterans and their families in ensuring they receive the benefits they have earned;
- Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Benefits Act (H.R. 2239): Extends eligibility for rehabilitation benefits from the Veterans Affairs Department; and
- Chiropractic Care Available to All Veterans Act (H.R. 1470): Requires all Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers to provide chiropractic care and services.

Since taking office in January, Congressman Altmire has worked with his colleagues in Congress to honor veterans by improving veterans' health care, strengthening benefits for our men and women in uniform today, and providing long overdue benefits for the veterans and military retirees who have already served. Congressman Altmire is working to ensure that local VA facilities have the resources they need to provide essential health care services and voted five times to increase federal funding for veterans, totaling more than \$11 billion.